



## Esther Bubley

Esther Bubley was born February 16, 1921 in Phillips, Wisconsin, the fourth of five children of Russian-Jewish immigrants. In 1936, while a senior at Central High School, the first issue of *Life* was published. Influenced by *Life* and Farm Security Administration photographs of the Great Depression she became very interested in documentary photography. After high school, she attended Superior State Teachers College and then enrolled in the photography program at the Minneapolis School of Art. In 1941 she moved to Washington, D.C., looking for work as a photographer. Not finding a job in Washington, she moved to New York City and found a position for a short time at *Vogue*. Early in 1942, she returned to Washington when she was offered a position as a microfilmer for the National Archives and Records Administration. In the fall of 1942, Roy Stryker hired her as a darkroom assistant at the Office of War Information (OWI). With the encouragement of Stryker and some of the senior photographers she became a field photographer, documenting the home front during World War II. One of her first assignments was a long cross country bus trip in the Midwest and South, documenting bus travel, which had increased because of wartime rationing of gas and tires. In late 1943, she followed Stryker, who left the OWI to work on a project for the Standard Oil of New Jersey. Reprising of her earlier OWI bus story, she did a *Bus Story* series for Standard Oil, earning her the award for Best Picture Sequence in the Encyclopedia Britannica/University of Missouri School of Journalism "News Pictures of the Year" in 1948. In 1947 she started working for the Children's Bureau, a federal child welfare agency. She contributed thousands of photographs to their files, and her images appeared on more than thirty covers of the journal *The Child*. In 1949, her photo essay on mental illness, published in *Ladies' Home Journal*, earned a first place award for a feature in the Encyclopedia Britannica/University of Missouri School of Journalism contest. She continued freelancing for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, producing a dozen photo stories for the series "How America Lives." In 1951, Bubley began freelancing for *Life*, contributing forty photo stories. Also in 1951, she produced a series on the Pittsburgh Children's Hospital for Stryker, who was then head of the Pittsburgh photographic project. In 1953, she worked for UNICEF in Morocco to photograph a project to treat trachoma, an infectious disease that causes blindness. In 1954, she submitted a photo from her UNICEF work in a contest sponsored by *Photography* magazine and was the first woman to win first place in the international division. In 1955, Edward Steichen included her work in his *The Family of Man* exhibition. In 1956, Pepsi-Cola hired her to cover Latin America for their magazine *Panorama*. In the 1960s, Pan American World Airways sent her around the world to take photographs for their corporate library. In the late 1960s, she spent more time at home, photographing New York City. As a devoted animal lover, she walked her dog in Central Park in the mornings, taking photographs and notes about the Park. She did publish two children's books about animals, one about kittens and the other

about puppies, and a book featuring photography of plants. She was one of the first women to successfully have a career as a freelance photographer for major magazines. She died in New York City on March 16, 1998.

### **Esther Bubley Bibliography**

*Esther Bubley: On Assignment.* Esther Bubley. New York: Aperture, 2005.

*Esther Bubley's World of Children in Photographs.* Esther Bubley. New York: Dover Publications, 1981.

*Field of Vision: The Photographs of Esther Bubley: The Library of Congress.* Amy Pastan. Washington, DC: D. Giles, 2010.

*How Kittens Grow.* Millicent E. Selam. Photos by Esther Bubley. New York: Four Winds, 1973.

*How Puppies Grow.* Millicent E. Selam. Photos by Esther Bubley. New York: Four Winds Press, 1971.

*Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the U.S. Government, 1935 to 1944: Esther Bubley, Marjory Collins, Pauline Ehrlich, Dorothea Lange, Martha McMillan Roberts, Marion Post Wolcott, Ann Rosener, Louise Rosskam.* Andrea Fisher. New York: Pandora Press, 1987.

*A Mysterious Presence: Macrophotography of Plants.* Percy Knauth, with photos by Esther Bubley. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1979.

*World of Children in Photographs.* Esther Bubley. New York: Dover, 1982.

### **Esther Bubley Websites**

Carnegie Library of Philadelphia: The Photographers  
<http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/photog6.html>

Esther Bubley, Photojournalist  
<http://estherbubley.com/>

Women Come to the Front: Journalists, Photographers and Broadcasters during WWII: Esther Bubley  
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0012.html>

Women Photojournalists: Esther Bubley  
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/bubleyintro.html>